

# MISSOURI. Conservationist

VOLUME 70, ISSUE 12, DECEMBER 2009 • SERVING NATURE & YOU



# Reflections

Next month, I will retire as director of your Missouri Department of Conservation. There are seasons and cycles in nature, and a season is changing in my life. I have enjoyed this work, but I look

forward to the next season. My wife, Janet, and I are moving to our Carter County farm, where we can live simply, close to the land and close to our family.

It has been a remarkable journey from childhood on a small Ozark farm to teacher, conservation agent and director of this excellent state agency. The real credit for my career belongs to my family who supported and endured through years in which my conservation service required a depth of time and commitment. My wife, my sons and my parents shared that commitment and understood what I did and why.

I have tried to be mindful that Missourians have a wide range of desires and expectations. Department leaders have listened to the public in a variety of ways, from dozens of town hall meetings to surveys of hunters and anglers to public comment via the Web, e-mail and the Department ombudsman.

Much has been achieved. We streamlined operations to save money and balance necessary capital improvement projects and important public services. Some credit for this rests in execution of a good strategic plan, but the real credit belongs to many excellent conservationists, both staff and volunteers, who have worked with commitment, passion and energy for a mission in which they genuinely believe.

We completed conservation education facilities in Kansas City, St. Louis, Cape Girardeau, Joplin and Winona and began new school programs, because Missourians consistently tell us that conservation education is one of their top priorities. We

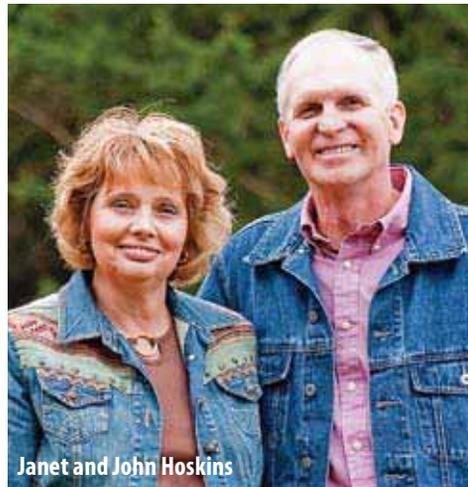
also improved fish hatcheries, shooting ranges, roads, parking lots, stream accesses and other facilities to encourage and enhance hunting, angling and other outdoor experiences on conservation lands. We have improved or created thousands of acres of upland wildlife habitat on conservation areas. We mounted an ambitious program of service to Missouri landowners, and, in so doing, we helped people improve their fish, forest and wildlife habitat, too.

I am pleased with the breadth and depth of progress the Department has made in the past seven and half years, and I look forward with optimism to the next cycle of Department leadership. The next director and leadership team will advance the cause of conservation in ways and deeds I cannot know today.

I regard the Department and the Missouri Conservation Commission to be the highest of public institutions and models for what public service should be. I feel blessed and privileged to have been a small part of it.

Above all, I wish to leave you with a heartfelt expression of thanks for the trust you have placed in Missouri's special system of conservation governance and in me. Citizen support is the foundation of Missouri's remarkable conservation story through decades of challenge and progress. Missouri conservation has been and will continue to be what the people want it to be, and I am confident that the best days are yet to come.

John Hoskins, director



Janet and John Hoskins

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**OUR MISSION:** *To protect and manage the fish, forest and wildlife resources of the state; to serve the public and facilitate their participation in resource management activities; and to provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy and learn about fish, forest and wildlife resources.*

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Cover: Raccoon hunting by David Stonner  
Left: Family time on the prairie by Cliff White

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Hunting thrills and warm friendships hold this club together.

## NextGEN

This section reports on goals established in *The Next Generation of Conservation*. To read more about this plan, visit [www.MissouriConservation.org/12843](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/12843).

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## PUCKER UP

### I really enjoyed the article on persimmons

[October; Page 8] and will try the bread and tea recipes this year. I am a Missouri transplant, and I am eagerly learning all I can about the beautiful natural world Missouri offers. Talking with friends who are Missouri natives, I heard it said that some folk look to the persimmon to predict the winter. The seeds are the key in this folklore or fact. It was said that when you split the seed coat, the embryo will be one of three shapes: a spoon, a fork or a knife. A "spoon" would mean plenty of snow. A "fork" would mean a good harvest or a "normal" winter, whatever that is. And a "knife" would predict a cutting cold. I have picked a persimmon this September and split a seed to see what we might expect—dust

off the snow shovels, I saw a spoon! Thanks for your great articles.

*Eric Jackson, director of education, Powell Gardens*

Missouri is teeming with free produce if you know where and when to find it and what to do with it. For the adventurous home wine-maker, I highly recommend persimmon wine. I discovered dry persimmon mead when I was given a 5-gallon bucket of very ripe persimmons a few years back. I'll make wine out of anything, I consider it a challenge, and it's best when the fruit is free. The sweet honey-like aroma of ripe persimmons got me to thinking that honey would make a good flavor combination, so I found a persimmon wine recipe and replaced part of the sugar with honey. The result was a complex and truly astonishing wine reminiscent of Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc that all my wine-loving friends seem to enjoy.

*Chris Cady, Ph.D., Columbia*

Reading Larry Beckett's story, I was fondly reminded of the hike my friend Darwin Portman led, for years prior to his death, for the St. Louis-area Gateway chapter of American Youth Hostels. He called it Portman's Perennial Persimmon Picking Perambulation, and ended the day by giving each of us a copy of his own favorite recipe for persimmon bread. I, of course, rushed home to give it a try, and the recipe, somewhat worse for wear, is still in my collection.

*Joel Achtenberg, Webster Groves*

## ALL ABOARD?

I suppose it was inevitable that Hunter Education courses would be handled on the web. I would hate to see the classroom method done entirely away with though. I took the course with my son in 1985. It was not convenient either, but we enjoyed it all. In fact, today we often speak of the class and share some laughs about some of the characters who were in it. As I recall, it was taught by a conservation agent, and a life-long hunter who volunteered. They shared some great stories from their personal experiences that made the learning fun. I feel certain that other instructor volunteers bring just such an approach to it as well. Online is fine, but do not do away with the classroom.

*Jim Karr, Blue Springs*

## CAREFUL DRESSER

The tips in *Trophy Deer Care* [October] were very good, especially coming from a veteran taxidermist. However, I oppose splitting the pelvis when field dressing a deer as it can result in broken knife blades and/or injury. I have broken two or three blades this way and know one man who cut his thumb so badly that he required surgery to reattach tendons. As noted in the article, the lower intestine and fecal matter can be removed without splitting the bone. Then I fillet the meat from the pelvic bone, allowing the legs to splay out and the hams cool. I begin my cut where the hams come together and slowly fillet along the pelvic bone in either direction. Harvesting larger game (such as elk) taught me lessons about the futility of splitting the pelvic bone, which I now apply to my whitetail harvests as well.

*Mike Billman, Prairie City, Ore.*



### Reader Photo

### FOWL WEATHER

Barbara Baker of Florissant captured this picture of icy canvasback ducks at the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary on the Mississippi River north of St. Louis. Baker says the temperature was 9 degrees with a high wind. "But, I have found that the colder it is, the more likely it is I will find great migratory bird photo opportunities," says Baker. "I love living along the Mississippi flyway."

# MISSOURI Conservationist

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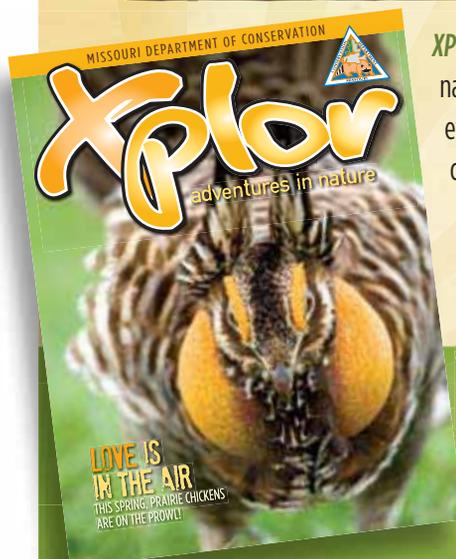
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**Kids' site** (beginning February 2010):  
[www.xplormo.org](http://www.xplormo.org)  
**MDC Web site:** [www.MissouriConservation.org](http://www.MissouriConservation.org)

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## New Kids' Magazine



**XPLOR** will ignite children's curiosity unlike any other nature magazine. Six times a year we'll bring you eye-popping art, photos and stories about Missouri's coolest critters, niftiest natural places, liveliest outdoor activities and people who've made a living in the wild. Don't keep the door closed another minute. Come outside with us and **XPLOR!**

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Southern twayblade orchid

## PLANTS & ANIMALS

### “Miracle” Orchid Discovered

In April, members of the Missouri Native Plant Society discovered an orchid new to Missouri. While checking on known locations of rare sedges and an imperiled orchid, Justin Thomas noticed a tiny wildflower nearby and snapped a few photos of it. Looking at the photos later, he realized it was Southern twayblade orchid (*Listera australis*). The next day, Thomas and others found the plant again and confirmed its identity. All agreed it was a miracle no one had accidentally stepped on the plant. Just as amazing was the fact that Thomas had spotted what other accomplished botanists missed. An exhaustive search failed to turn up any additional Southern twayblade plants, but others might be hiding nearby, since they do not bloom every year. For more information about the Missouri Native Plant Society, visit [www.missourinativeplantsociety.org](http://www.missourinativeplantsociety.org).

## CLEAN WATER

### Exotic Snails Spreading

The latest in a seemingly endless parade of exotic plants and animals to show up in Missouri turned up in the Niangua River last year. A vacationer reported finding snails the size of chicken eggs near a private boat ramp

at Mountain Creek Campground. Fisheries biologists identified them as Chinese mystery snails, which are on Missouri’s list of prohibited species. Besides being illegal to possess, they have the potential to multiply out of control, upsetting the ecological balance in Missouri waters. Considering how many high flows have occurred on the Niangua River in the past year,

the snails likely have spread to other locations as well. Chinese mystery snails arrived in the United States through Asian food markets and the pet trade. The Niangua River infestation was the sixth confirmed in Missouri. The only known control method is hand removal. Much more important is to avoid spreading this and other aquatic invaders. The simplest precaution is never dumping aquaria or fishing bait. Releasing live bait into Missouri waters is illegal. Information about invasive species is available at [www.MissouriConservation.org/8228](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/8228).

## LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE

### Celebrating 10 Years of Service

Ten years after its creation the Private Land Services Division is taking stock of its accomplishments and preparing for the future. Created as the Private Land Section in September 1999, it was upgraded to a division three months later. Its workers have made 75,000 detailed technical assistance contacts with landowners, helped 34,000 people deal with wildlife damage and provided more than \$9 million in Conservation Department-funded cost sharing to landowners. The division also has made significant strides in bobwhite quail restoration. Much of this success has hinged on partnerships ranging from traditional private wildlife clubs to a variety of agricultural based organizations. Division Chief Bill McGuire recently announced his plans to retire. Among challenges he says will extend beyond his watch are feral hog eradication, strengthening connections to rural and agricultural communities, prairie chicken restoration and improving management of non-industrial private forest land, which makes up more than 80 percent of Missouri’s forestland.

## PLANTS & ANIMALS

### Feral Hog Toll Mounts

The outcome of Missouri’s war against feral hogs remains uncertain, but conservation officials are gathering intelligence behind enemy lines and marshalling forces for a pitched battle. Established populations of

wild domestic swine, razorbacks and Russian boars exist in 20 counties, mostly in southern Missouri. Another 19 areas scattered all over Missouri have isolated feral hog populations. Feral hogs take acorns and other foods away from wildlife. They root up forests and fields, destroying crops, food plots, roots, small mammals and the eggs of ground-nesting birds, including quail and turkeys. They wallow in springs, creating erosion and fouling streams with their feces. Sharp tusks and aggressive dispositions make feral hogs dangerous. They also carry diseases, including brucellosis and pseudorabies, which could harm people and devastate Missouri's livestock industry. The Conservation Department has removed more

than 200 hogs from conservation areas and surrounding private property this year. Efforts by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service bring Missouri's 2009 hog removal total to nearly 400. The two most effective hog removal methods have been shooting hogs from a helicopter and catching hogs in corral-type traps.

### Cuts Include Office Closings

As part of efforts to cut annual costs by an estimated \$7.5 million, the Conservation Department will close or end lease agreements for 13 office facilities throughout the state by July 2011. Facilities slated for closure are offices

in Branson, Brookfield, Farmington, Fredericktown, Ironton, Liberty, Marble Hill, Sullivan and Van Buren and at Hartell, Little Dixie and Long Branch conservation areas and the University of Missouri Horticulture and Agroforestry Research Center. Most of these offices have six or fewer employees, most of whom spend the majority of their time in the field. Staff from these offices will move to other conservation facilities or work from home, as conservation agents do. The Department will reduce days of operation at six of its seven nature and education centers by spring of 2010. The closings will help the Conservation Department live within its financial means while continuing to provide quality conservation services.



## ASK THE OMBUDSMAN

**Q:** Why is there a crow season?

**A:** Depending on your point of view, you might ask why there is an open season on crows or why there is a closed season. Although not

considered a game bird, crows are eaten by some. Crows fall under federal regulation because they are migratory birds. Federal regulations allow the states to establish a hunting season not to exceed 124 days during the calendar year and prohibit hunting during the peak nesting period. Special federal and state permits may be obtained for shooting nuisance crows at other times. The Missouri hunting season is timed to allow the shooting of crows during the period when crows are causing the most damage to nut growers, agricultural crops and ornamental tree seedlings at nurseries. That allows crows to be controlled without special permits. The season is November 1st through March 3rd. A small-game hunting permit is required. For more information, see this Web site: [www.MissouriConservation.org/3214](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/3214).

**Q:** What happens to the fish and other wildlife in a pond when the pond freezes enough to ice skate on it?

**A:** The water in a pond freezes from the top down because ice is less dense than liquid water and therefore floats. So the pond may have a foot or more of ice at the surface but still have liquid water beneath. Fish can live under the ice but can be stressed or killed under persistent ice if snow prevents light from penetrating through the ice and reduces oxygen production from aquatic plants. Ponds in Missouri that are intended for fish should be constructed with a minimum depth of 8 feet, which will insure that they don't freeze solid. Some frogs, turtles, aquatic insects and other wildlife in a pond will overwinter in the mucky soil of the pond bottom. For more information on winter fish kills, download the Department's *Aquaguide on Fish Kills in Ponds and Lakes* at [www.MissouriConservation.org/8970](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/8970).



Crow

Ombudsman Tim Smith will respond to your questions, suggestions or complaints concerning Department of Conservation programs. Write him at PO Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180, call him at 573-522-4115, ext. 3848, or e-mail him at [Ombudsman@mdc.mo.gov](mailto:Ombudsman@mdc.mo.gov).

## Oh Christmas Tree!

*In our pursuit of convenience, let us not lose our connection to the natural world.*

ABOUT A GENERATION AGO we began a transition from having a natural or “real” Christmas tree in almost every living room to where most homes now display an artificial tree. The move away from real trees has been unstoppable and is almost certain to continue. That’s because artificial trees are economical. New buyers swell the ranks of those who already own them. The numbers argue that we will someday reach a point where a natural Christmas tree is a real oddity.

My friends have gone artificial for good reasons. One was teary-eyed every Christmas until she discovered that she was allergic to pine trees. Another said that a real tree that sheds needles just wasn’t an option after she had white carpet installed in her living room. Many people reported deliberating—sometimes arguing—among family members over the decision, but after all that they went to the store and bought a tree that came in a box. No one can blame them; artificial trees are clean, lightweight, convenient and care-free. They’ve been made that way to persuade us away from choosing natural trees, which can be dirty, imperfect and a real bother to set up and dispose.

We’ve been persuaded to accumulate many artificial things. Our televisions, computers, video games, treadmills and vehicles have clear benefits. They make our lives easier, safer and, in some cases, more interesting. Like the artificial Christmas tree, however, these manufactured items increasingly push out the real or natural elements in our lives. Just consider how much of their lives people spend staring at a screen or riding in an automobile. Even the treadmill keeps us away from pounding the trails.

It’s hard to imagine living in the modern world without the goods we own, but we don’t have to let them own us. Use them as the tools they were designed to be and let them help you connect to the natural world. Log onto your computer to search for fishing, hunting or hiking spots and information. Visit [www.MissouriConservation.org](http://www.MissouriConservation.org) to find nearby conservation areas, nature trails and places to fish, hunt or look for wild birds. Watch some of the videos you’ll discover there to learn how to cast a fly, navigate by compass or call like a bluejay. Use your car to take you to places where birds, bugs, deer and squirrels are and where you can get out and walk around.

You’ll likely encounter rough terrain, an occasional soaking, pesky insects, slippery rocks, sticktights and a quite a bit of dirt, but that’s the stuff that makes the outdoors a place of real adventure.

—Tom Cwynar, photo by David Stonner



**Photo right:** Along the Maries River near Westphalia.

### **For More Information**

To learn more about outdoor activities in Missouri visit [www.MissouriConservation.org](http://www.MissouriConservation.org).



## Mourning Dove

*Don't let their sad song fool you, these stout, industrious birds get along well—with or without us.*

QUIET, TOLERANT AND attractive, mourning doves (*Zenaida macroura*) make fine neighbors. In fact, though they predate humans in America, they've made the best of our arrival and strange behaviors.

Native Americans and European settlers inadvertently helped these birds prosper by burning prairie, clearing forest and grazing livestock, creating bare areas for feeding and enhancing the growth of seed-producing plants. The doves also benefitted from farmed crops. Modern practices such as irrigation, tree planting and grain storage facilities have continued to improve habitat.

Slightly smaller and more streamlined than its city-dwelling cousin, the rock dove, the mourning dove is gray-brown with black spots on the wings. Its tail is long and tapered to a point, with large white tips on the feathers, and it has a small, black bill and red legs and feet. Males have a light, rosy breast, blueish-gray crown, and iridescent neck feathers. The mourning dove gets its name from its "sad" song, a soft, inflected *cooAHoo*, followed by several coos.

Adult doves eat the seeds of wild annuals and waste grains from agriculture. While they readily consume wheat, corn, sorghum, sunflower and rice leavings, they are rarely destructive to standing crops. The birds' foot structure prevents them from perching on upright stalks and canes and feeding directly from plants.

The mourning dove is one of the most widely distributed and abundant birds in North America. They are found throughout Missouri, with the greatest densities in the west central portion. Most Missouri doves do not overwinter in the state. They migrate to Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mexico and Central America. Because they cross state lines and international boundaries, they are classified as a Federal Migratory Species. Populations are managed on a national level by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Mourning doves return to Missouri in March. Following courtship in April, the monogamous mated pairs begin nest construction. Doves nest primarily in trees and shrubs in areas with scattered trees, at field and forest edges, fence rows or along creek banks. Nests consist of two or three twigs placed on a horizontal tree branch. They might also use old robin or bluebird nests, or nest on the ground on glades and prairies, creating a scraped area with a sparse vegetation lining.

Males help chase away rivals, incubate eggs and feed the young, which are known as squabs. The average clutch size is two eggs. Newly hatched squabs are fed "pigeon milk," a secretion from the adult crop gland. Young doves grow rapidly, and are fully fledged at 13–15 days. Once the pair completes the first nest, they start on the next. Dove pairs average an impressive five nests per year. This is a necessary effort, as less than 50 percent of nesting attempts are successful due to weather and predators such as snakes, hawks, skunks and other mammals.

—Nichole LeClair Terrill, photo by Noppadol Paothong

### For More Information

To learn more about mourning doves, visit [www.MissouriConservation.org/8151](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/8151) or [www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Mourning\\_Dove/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Mourning_Dove/id)





## Amarugia Highlands CA

*This ruggedly beautiful area just an hour south of Kansas City is a haven for anglers, birders and hunters.*



ABOUT 10 MILES northwest of Archie in Cass County, Amarugia Highlands Conservation Area occupies a part of the rugged landscape once known as “The Kingdom of Amarugia.” Sometime after the Civil War, a group of people formed their own government and society here.

Few details of their efforts remain, but a 1,041-acre tract in the southern portion of their community became Missouri Department of Conservation property in 1983.

The Department immediately began turning the area’s old crop fields, grasslands and woodlands into a haven for outdoor enthusiasts. One of the first projects was the 45-acre Amarugia Lake, which was completed in 1987. The lake supports a good population of channel catfish, crappie and sunfish, and it is equipped with a boat ramp. Anglers will also find several ponds throughout the area, as well as access to the South Grand River and South Fork Creek.

The area’s diverse habitat, which includes a 100-acre constructed wetland, is managed for a variety of game and non-game wildlife species. Each season offers new opportunities to harvest local bounty, discover a surprising natural detail or capture a moment of beauty with your camera. The wetland offers waterfowl hunting and viewing, and it attracts lots of shorebirds during migration.

In December, birders can expect to see bald eagles hunting for waterfowl around the wetland area, which is accessible by foot via the field road and the levees. Haying and controlled burning maintain plant diversity in open areas. Habitat plantings include trees, shrubs and native grasses. As a result, the area is home to a great number of shrub and grassland bird species—grasshopper sparrows, quail and Bell’s vireo, to name a few.

Hunters can pursue deer, dove, rabbit, squirrel and turkey in season, and they can hunt waterfowl in season until 1 p.m. Trapping is permitted with a special-use permit.

The Kingdom of Amarugia’s founders intended to make a better world for themselves. Unfortunately for these pioneering souls, their social experiment failed. Fortunately for us, they left a landscape that improved public access to outdoor recreation opportunities for all Missourians.

—Bonnie Chasteen, photo by Noppadol Paothong

**Photo Right:** Bald eagle

**Recreation opportunities:** Fishing, canoeing, birding, hunting and trapping.

**Unique features:** Stocked lake, access to South Grand River and South Fork Creek, boat ramp and disabled-accessible parking, privy and fishing jetty

**Location:** From 71 Highway, go west of Archie on Route A 5 miles and then 4.5 miles north on Route W.

### For More Information

Call 816-622-0900 or visit [www.MissouriConservation.org/a8310](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/a8310).



**ON THE DRIVE HOME** from work, I watch the sun set in an orange sky, chased by a blanket of deep blue. The first stars are starting to show. Cool, clear and calm; I know it will be a good night to go out.

I pull into the driveway and look toward the dog pen. Inside are two fine hounds, both looking expectantly in my direction. As I get out of the truck and walk toward the house, they don't bark or jump like they do on some days; they just stare and shiver, whining occasionally like dogs do when they seem to know what lies ahead.

When I stroll into the kitchen I am met with expectant looks from some other regular inhabitants—my two kids. Wyatt, 16 years old and usually focused on food, is finishing up refrigerator leftovers and Rozalyn, 12 years old and more studious, is finishing up homework.

After exchanging routine pleasantries about the day's events, I say, "This sure would be a good night to go out."

"I was thinking the same thing, Dad!" says Wyatt, as if he was just waiting for the right time, "Want me to get the dogs ready?"

"Hey, I wanna go, too!" Rozalyn adds, as she folds up her school work.

I stare up at the ceiling as if I am contemplating the situation. My wife, Cindy, who had been quietly watching the scenario unfold, gives me an odd look and rolls her eyes, knowing full well that she and I had discussed this before I left from work.

"Let's do it!" I say, and that sets both of them into immediate action.

I swap my work clothes for coon-hunting garb, grab some supper-to-go and meet the kids outside at the truck. The dogs are already loaded in the dog box and the sound of their tails thumping against the wooden walls signals their excitement. I quickly go over the list of items needed: lights, dog leads, knife, rifle, bullets, water, GPS. After each item is called off it is followed by a "Check, Dad!" from Wyatt and Roz.

Satisfied that we have everything, we all hop into the truck and head for a place we nicknamed "Coon Paradise," several large tracts of private land laced with row crop bottom land and wooded draws and hills, where the landowners have graciously granted us hunting privileges.

On the way to our hunting spot we laugh and joke, sing silly songs, and talk about past coon hunting trips. We discuss coon dogs both past and present and then try to predict how the dogs will perform tonight. I breathe in the closeness of the three of us having fun together and smile.

## **CUT 'EM LOOSE**

When we arrive at Coon Paradise the dogs start to bark with anticipation. Darkness has engulfed the landscape



before us and, with no moon to intrude, the sky is filled with stars. As we all get out of the truck Roz and Wyatt grab the leashes and I sling the rifle across my back.

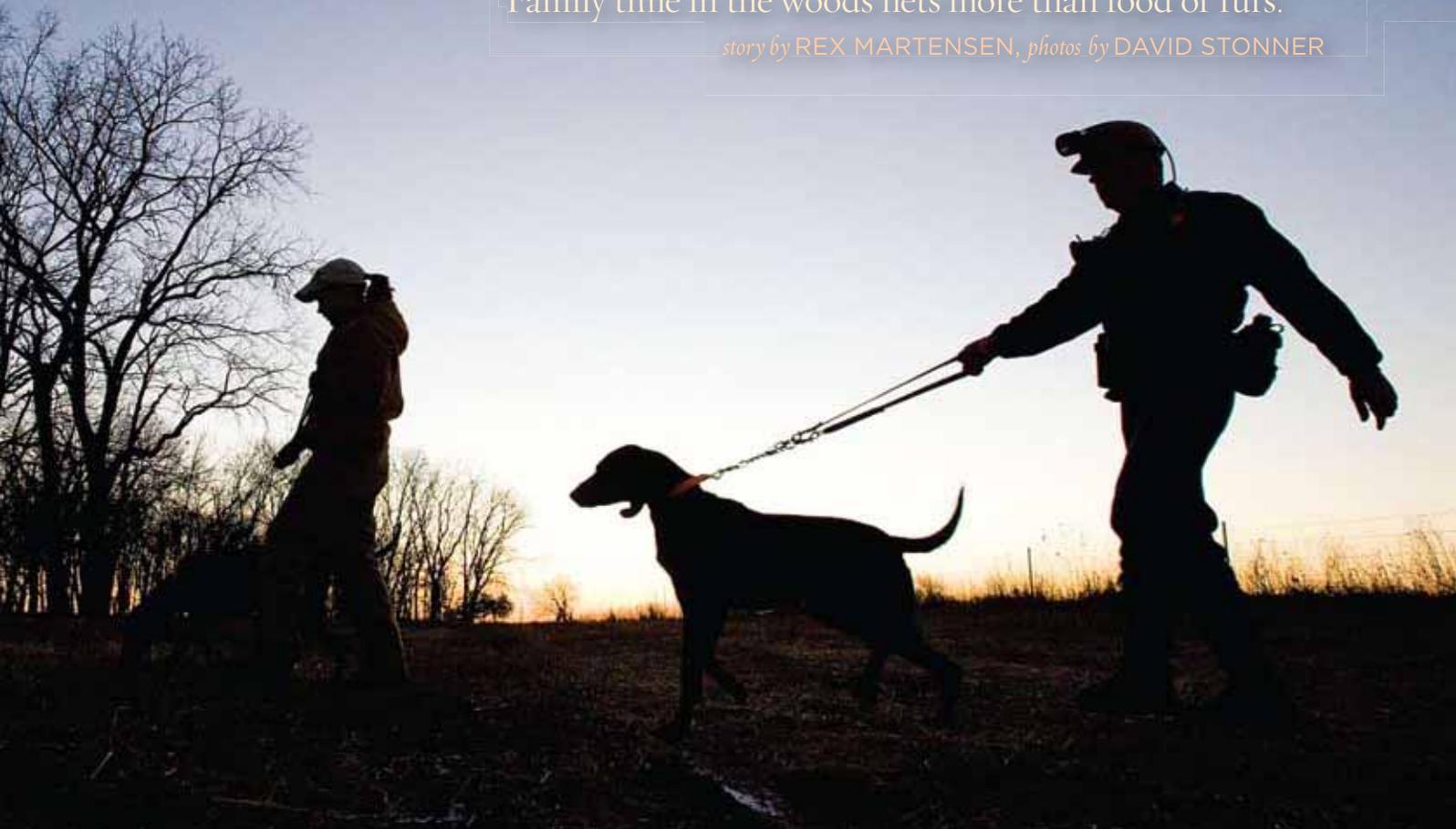
With our headlamps to light the way, we move toward the back of the truck. Wyatt and Roz drop the tailgate and stand in front of the two doors of the dog box, each door holding back an excited black and tan coonhound. I stand out of the way, yet positioned to intercept any dog that might slip past the kids.

The doors are opened and both Wyatt and Roz successfully catch their dog and attach the leashes to their collars. Both dogs bolt off of the tailgate and hit the ground, pulling the leashes taut.

# A GOOD NIGHT to GO OUT

Family time in the woods nets more than food or furs.

story by REX MARTENSEN, photos by DAVID STONNER



Rozalyn, barely able to stand her ground, has Maggie at the end of her leash. The older of the two hounds, Maggie is easy to handle and highly experienced.

Wyatt is holding back Ellie, a younger, bigger hound. Ellie is a little more aggressive and more independent than Maggie or, in other words, “hardheaded.” Both dogs are a real pleasure to hunt.

We head to the closest block of timber near the edge of a harvested corn field. The dogs instinctively lead the way. Our lights cut through the darkness in random fashion as we make our way behind them. When we get to the timber, Roz and Wyatt take their dogs by the collar with one hand and place their other hand on the leash snap.

**Rex Martensen and his daughter, Rozalyn, take their dogs out for a mid-winter raccoon hunt in Moniteau County.**

They look my way, waiting for instruction.

“Cut ‘em loose!” I call.

The dogs are unleashed and both explode into the timber, disappearing into the darkness. We shut off our lights and take in the night. We can hear the dogs canvassing the forest floor for the slightest hint of raccoon scent as they make their way deeper into the woods.

Rozalyn nudges Wyatt and says, “Bet Maggie strikes first.” (A strike is when a hound smells coon scent and starts barking or “giving mouth.”)

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that!” says Wyatt, knowing full well it could go either way.

Before anymore could be said, the conversation was interrupted by the excited sound of a hound giving mouth on a fresh coon track.

“That’s Maggie!” announces Roz, proudly.

Before Wyatt can respond, Ellie opens up with her deeper bawl, letting us know she is in on this race, too.

The kids know well the sound of each dog and can identify them immediately. They know if the track is fresh or old by the way the dogs bark. They can interpret by sound if the track is getting hard to follow because of obstacles and terrain. And they know when the dogs are getting ready to tree by the sound of their voices. It is a language learned by spending many nights in the woods following coon hounds. We listen intently as the dogs talk to us and move the track further up the hollow.

The dogs are giving plenty of mouth, each complementing the other as they pursue a common goal. Their barks

**Rex and his daughter, Rozalyn, follow the excited dogs to a treed raccoon.**

and bawls fill the night air with a kind of symphony every houndsman can relate to as special music.

“This is a hot one, Dad!” says Wyatt.

I agree. “We better move up so they don’t get too far ahead,” I say.

We turn on our lights and enter the woods where the dogs had just entered. We can hear their excited barks still echoing above the rustling leaves. Before we reach the top of the wooded ridge we lose the sound of the dogs. Topping the ridge, we listen intently between our collective heavy breathing and over our accelerated heart beats.

Ellie breaks the silence, loud and clear, letting us know they are still on the trail. She is across the next hollow on the facing hill side. We stand silently to “read” what is going on. Maggie breaks in with her sharper and slightly higher-pitched voice and both dogs continue working the track up the side of the next wooded hill. Then silence.

We are close enough to faintly hear some rustling leaves where the dogs are trying to unravel the trail left by their quarry. “I think they’re getting ready to locate,” says Wyatt. (A “locate” is when a dog is deciding which



tree the coon has gone up, usually indicated by a distinct vocalization such as a long bawl.)

"You might be right," I say, "Or that ol' coon might have just given them the slip!"

Right then Ellie let out a long, loud, dying bawl. "There it is!" hollers Roz. Ellie further confirms that she has found the right tree with two more bawls followed by a consistent, double-chop. (A "chop" is a short, loud, consecutive bark that continues until the hunter reaches the tree.) I can see that the kids are anxious to start heading toward the tree where Ellie is proclaiming victory.

"We better wait for Maggie to back her up just to be certain," I say.

It doesn't take long. Maggie, more methodical and calculated, falls in right behind her with a single locate and immediate chopping to let us know she agrees with Ellie.

"That's it!" announces Wyatt. "Both dogs are locked on tight to that tree!"

We listen for a while as the excited barks of both dogs echo through the air in perfect harmony, dominating the night atmosphere. It is the crescendo to the musical that began earlier in the evening. Our hearts are beating fast, not from climbing a hill this time, but from excitement.

"We better get over there and see what they have," I say.

## HIDE AND SEEK

We move ahead, picking a path through the timber with our lights showing the way, following the increasing sound of the dogs. We cross a small creek in the bottom of the hollow and start up the hillside where the dogs continue to proudly announce their successful conclusion to the race. "There they are!" says Wyatt, being the first one to approach the tree. Rozalyn and I are close behind and find both dogs reared up on the tree and chopping with every breath.

I take some time to praise the dogs while Roz and Wyatt search the tree for any sign of a raccoon. The dogs are treed on a big white oak. Branches go in every direction and reach high into the night sky. I join Wyatt and Roz in their effort to find the coon in the overhead branches.

We methodically search each branch and analyze every bump that looks out of place. Then I see a lump that doesn't quite fit in with the rest of the branch that I'm searching. As I continue to study that lump, the outline of an ear becomes evident, then the black from a ringed tail seems to emerge from out of nowhere.

"Here he is!" I holler, bringing the kids to my location. The dogs continue to sing their song as Roz and Wyatt also discover Mr. Coon hiding among the branches.

"Can I shoot this one, Dad?" Rozalyn asks.

Wyatt protests, "She'll never hit that coon, Dad."

I gently remind Wyatt of some of his first attempts at shooting a coon in a tree and he quickly drops the subject.

Since she is experienced with a gun, I agree to let Rozalyn try her hand at shooting a raccoon. We search for the best possible angle to assure a clean and humane kill. Rozalyn finds a small tree to steady her aim, and I position myself directly behind her to offer some expert advice. The dogs, having been through this routine many times, have slowed their barking just enough to look our way occasionally in anticipation of what comes next.

Rozalyn finds the raccoon in the rifle scope while Wyatt and I keep it illuminated with our lights. She calmly chambers a bullet into the .22 rifle, keeping her quarry in sight. The sound of the rifle action opening and closing causes the dogs to stop barking and start looking up in the tree top.

"Find your spot ... take a deep breath ... squeeze the trigger," I quietly coach Rozalyn from behind.

Without warning, the night is split from the loud crack of Rozalyn's rifle. Her aim is true, and the bullet squarely finds its mark. The following moments are chaotic. The raccoon hits the ground dead, but the dogs, who had been watching it fall through the limbs, grab on tight just to make sure. Wyatt attempts to handle the dogs while Rozalyn and I safely and immediately unload the gun, always standard practice. We then assist Wyatt in his effort to put leashes on the dogs and tie them to some nearby trees.

For a short moment the three of us silently stand over the subject of our hunt and reflect on the events of this experience in our own way. Congratulations are passed on to Rozalyn for her expert marksmanship. Even Wyatt concedes and gives her a pat on the back. I take on the task of skinning the large boar raccoon, explaining all of the finer points for the benefit of the kids. Someday I hope to just sit back and watch while they do the skinning.

Since this is a school night we take advantage of our early success and, despite some protest from the kids, decide to call it a night. I shoulder the rifle and take Maggie, Wyatt takes Ellie and Rozalyn proudly carries the fur from her first raccoon and we start heading toward the truck.

We're hunters; we actively participate in the proverbial "circle of life." My children know and understand the value of life and the finality of death. They have learned to respect the outdoors and the inhabitants therein. We hunt for food, fur and the enjoyment of our dogs and, especially, each other's company.

On the ride home the excitement level is still high. Wyatt and Roz are chattering about the details of the hunt, including Rozalyn's ability with a gun. I'm smiling, quietly taking it all in, satisfied that it truly was a good night to go out. ▲

# Get Out!



This year, make a resolution that's actually fun to keep.

by MATT SEEK

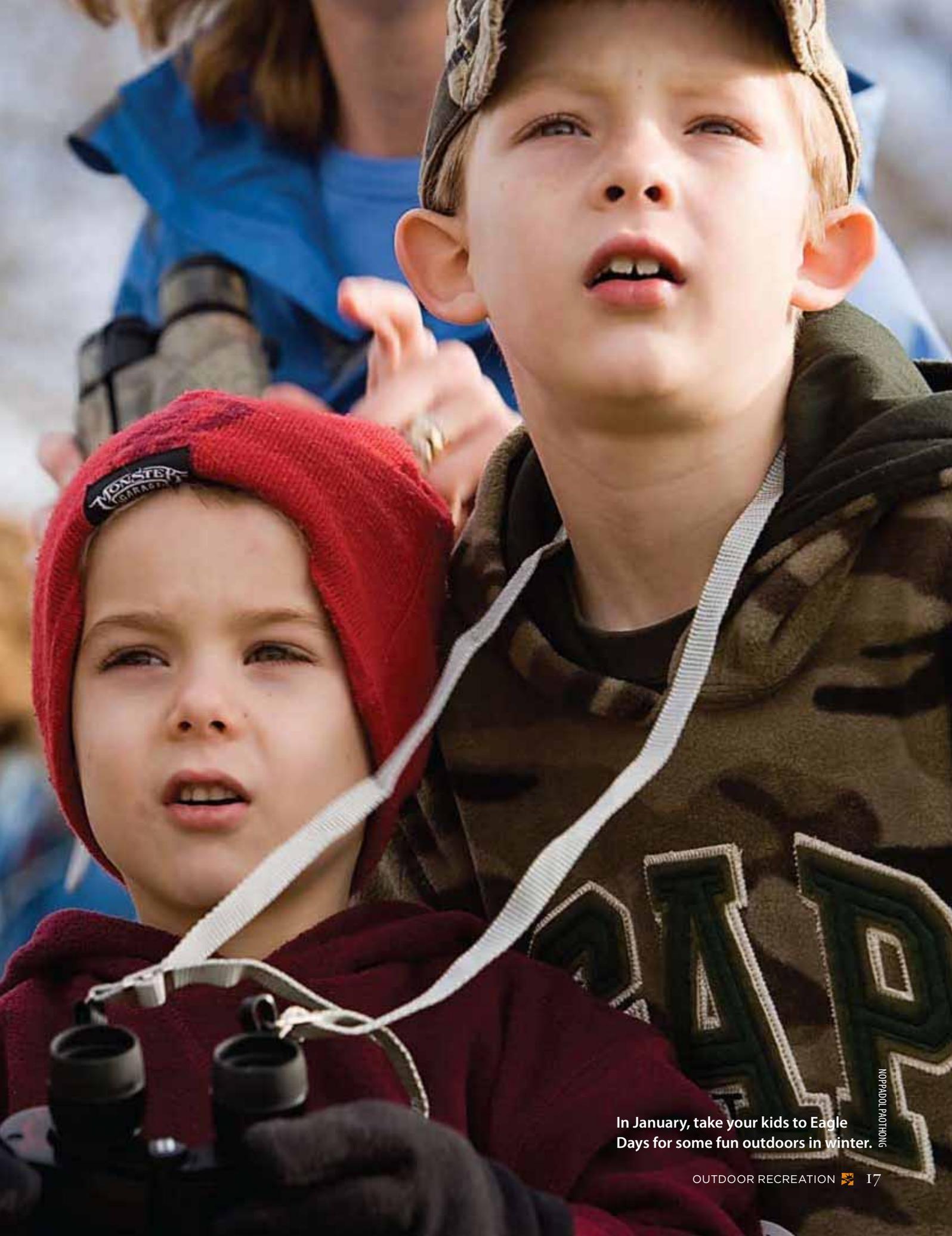
**A**h, a new year. A fresh start. Time to make some resolutions. Like most, you've probably set goals to lose weight, live healthier or spend more time with your family. Since you're reading the *Conservationist*, maybe you've resolved to do something beneficial for the environment.

What if there was a way to accomplish these resolutions without diets, fitness plans or "quality time with kids" entries in your calendar? In fact, there is. All you have to do is take your kids outside for an hour every day. Sound too good to be true? It's not.

Research has linked time spent outside to everything from weight loss to lower stress levels. But here's the really good news: getting outside is even more beneficial for children. In study after study, playing outside has been reported to make kids healthier, smarter and better behaved. Not surprisingly, getting outside has also been shown to foster greater appreciation for nature in children. That's the good news.

The bad news is that we live in an information-saturated environment where getting outside competes for your kids' time with television, the Internet, soccer practice and dance class (to name a few). To win the competition, getting out has to be more fun than staying in.

To help in that regard, what follows is a month-by-month list of fun things to do outside. All you have to do is resolve to get out—and take your kids with you!



In January, take your kids to Eagle Days for some fun outdoors in winter.

NORPADOL PHOTOGRAPHY

## January

**Encounter an eagle.** Every winter, thousands of bald eagles follow migrating flocks of waterfowl to the Show-Me State. With a little searching—and a good pair of binoculars—you and your kids can find eagles perched in trees along large rivers, lakes and wetlands. To ensure an encounter, attend Eagle Days. For dates and locations, visit [www.MissouriConservation.org/4153](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/4153).

### Go sled riding.

**Build an igloo.** Though Missouri rarely gets the deep, well-packed snow needed for authentic igloo construction, your kids can fashion a facsimile by packing snow into plastic storage tubs and stacking the resulting blocks.

## Tips for a Successful Experience

**Stay flexible.** Nothing ever goes according to plan with kids in the mix. So, be ready to throw out the plan. Though you headed to the pond to fish, your preschooler might rather throw rocks. Go with it. The objective is to have fun.

**Adapt to your child's age.** Most ideas listed in this article work for a wide range of ages, but some are better for a particular age group than others. For example, your high schoolers will likely roll their eyes if you suggest a woolly bear race, but may love the idea of going on a float trip.

**Dress appropriately.** It's tough for kids to appreciate nature when they're cold, wet and miserable.

**Pack a go-bag.** Keep a daypack stocked with extra clothes, water, sunscreen, bug repellent, binoculars, field guides and a small first aid kit. This way, it will always be ready to go when nature beckons.



**Station a treasure chest by the front door.** Get in the habit of having your kids empty their pockets into a "treasure chest" (i.e. old shoe box) as soon as they come inside. This ensures no mud balls or woolly worms end up in the wash.

**Participate.** Believe it or not, your kids look up to you. By participating in their adventures you show them that being outside is important and that you value spending time with them.

For more tips, things to do and information on the benefits of getting your kids outside, visit the National Wildlife Federation's Green Hour campaign at [www.greenhour.org](http://www.greenhour.org) or the Children and Nature Network at [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)

## February

**Scavenge.** Make a checklist of things found outside—feathers, pine cones, colored rocks—and send your kids on a scavenger hunt.

**Track animals through the snow.** For help figuring out what you're following (is that a skunk track, Daddy?) check out a field guide from your public library.

**Take a night hike.** Fear of the dark is nothing more than fear of the unknown. Teach your kids there's no reason to fear by taking them on a night hike. Use the full moon to light your way and listen for coyotes howling, owls hooting and frogs calling.

**Build a house.** Eastern bluebirds begin nesting in early March. To entice a pair into your yard, help your child build and put up a nest box. For building plans and pointers on where to place it, visit [www.MissouriConservation.org/8434](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/8434).

## March

**A is for Armadillo.** Go on an ABC hike with your preschooler. As you're walking, point out things in nature that begin with each of the letters of the alphabet. This works for colors, too.

**Witness a mass migration.** Your kids don't have to visit the African savanna to witness a critical mass of critters. Just take them to one of Missouri's wetlands in the spring. There they'll be rewarded with thousands of migrating ducks, geese and shorebirds all stopping in to fuel up for their long journey north.

**Fly a kite.**

**Take a picture.** Loan your child a camera and let them venture out to photograph nature. Seeing the world from a child's perspective is always enlightening, and you might discover your second-grader is a budding Ansel Adams.

## April

**Sing in the rain.** Remember, there's no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong clothes. Equip your kids with raincoats and galoshes and let them splash in puddles, make mud pies and build mud castles.

**Forget the baby chicks.** Let your kids catch tadpoles, bring them home, and watch them develop into adult frogs and toads. For tips on keeping baby amphibians alive, e-mail [pubstaff@mdc.mo.gov](mailto:pubstaff@mdc.mo.gov) and ask for a free copy of *Raising Tadpoles*.

**Hug a tree—better yet, plant one for Arbor Day.**

**Forage for fungi.** Let your kids participate in nature's Easter egg hunt: hit the woods to search for morel mushrooms. For help separating the tasty from the toxic, e-mail [pubstaff@mdc.mo.gov](mailto:pubstaff@mdc.mo.gov) and ask for a free copy of *Missouri's Edible and Poisonous Mushrooms*.



In April, equip your kids with the right clothes and let them play in the rain.

DAVID STONNER



CLIFF WHITE

## May

**Summon night creatures.** On a warm spring night, hang a sheet between two trees and set a bright lantern behind it. In a short time, any moths in the area will make for the sheet like, well, moths to a light. *Butterflies and Moths of Missouri* by J. Richard and Joan E. Heitzman (available at [www.mdcnatureshop.com](http://www.mdcnatureshop.com)) is a book that can help you identify your visitors.

**Grow something.** Gardening combines a child's affinity for getting dirty with the opportunity to witness the miracle of a tiny seed growing into a plant. Plus, if you grow vegetables, you get to eat them.

**Camp out.**

**Create a buzz.** When hummingbirds begin frequenting your feeder, let your kids sit quietly under it. Within minutes the fearless little birds will return, giving your children a front row air show.

**Set a record.** In mid-May, Missouri has more kinds of birds in the state than at any other time of the year. Arm your kids with binoculars and let them see how many different kinds they can count in a single 24-hour period. Birders call this a "Big Day," and go to great lengths to break the state record of 208 species.

## June

**Go log rolling.** A whole universe of life exists under fallen logs. Roll one over for your kids and let them watch what crawls, scurries or slithers out from underneath. Be sure to put the log back in its original place when you're done.

**Build a fort in the woods.**

**Witness metamorphosis.** Help your kids search the underside of milkweed leaves for monarch caterpillars. Bring a few home, keep them well fed with fresh milkweed, and in a few weeks the hungry caterpillars will turn into beautiful butterflies. For tips on monarch rearing, visit [www.monarchwatch.org](http://www.monarchwatch.org).

**Go fish.** A child's attention span is usually the limiting factor for fishing trips. Stack the odds in your favor by heading to a pond in June. This is when bluegill spawn, and any lure tossed in the direction of a male protecting his nest will surely elicit a strike.

**Catch fireflies.**

**Peruse a prairie.** Every June on prairies across Missouri, nature puts on a fireworks display of blooming wildflowers. Pack a picnic lunch, bring along a butterfly net and let your kids romp through one of these multi-colored grasslands. For directions to the nearest prairie, download this PDF: [www.MissouriConservation.org/76](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/76).

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**In July, take your kids to the nearest pond after sunset and go frogging.**



In August, discover Missouri's rocky streams and sandy beaches.

DAVID STONNER

## July

**Beat the heat.** Float an Ozark stream with your kids. The scenery is beautiful, riffles and rapids provide plenty of thrills, and spring-fed pools offer a refreshing respite from midsummer sun. There are plenty of great rivers to choose from. Check out *A Paddler's Guide to Missouri* (available at [www.mdcnatureshop.com](http://www.mdcnatureshop.com)) to help you make up your mind.

### Skip rocks across a pond or stream.

**Go froggin'.** Dress your kids in clothes you don't mind getting filthy and head to the nearest pond an hour after sunset. Take along a flashlight with a bright beam and shine it in the face of the nearest frog you see. This will cause the amphibian to freeze, giving your kids time to sneak up and grab it. You can let the frogs go, or—with the right permits—bring them home for a gourmet meal.

### Swim in a pond.

**Troll for mini-sharks.** When the moon is bright and the wind is calm, take your kids to a pond and let them twitch a topwater plug across its surface. In no time, the still water will erupt in a frenzy of Jaws-like splashing as hungry largemouth bass lunge up to inhale your kids' lures. With that kind of action, Shark Week pales in comparison.

## August

**Hit the beach.** Missouri may not have oceanfront real estate, but it does have hundreds of miles of sandy beaches. Don't believe it? Take your kids on a hike along the banks of one of our big rivers. There you'll find plenty of sandbars, perfect for building sand castles or having a picnic.

**Make a wish.** Though shooting stars can be seen at any time of the year, let your kids stay up late on the night of August 12–13, when the Perseid meteor shower peaks and up to 80 shooting stars can be seen every hour.

### Play hide-and-seek.

**Capture the flag.** When your kids have friends over, play capture-the-flag. All you need are two teams, two flags (bandanas work well), and a good-size yard, park or field in which to play. For a run-down of the rules, visit [http://usscouts.org/games/game\\_cf.asp](http://usscouts.org/games/game_cf.asp).

**Hunt for buried treasure.** There are literally hundreds of geocaches—containers filled with trinkets—hidden across the state. Visit [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) to get coordinates to one, program these into a GPS device, and turn your kids loose on a high tech treasure hunt. If you want to go old school, draw up your own treasure map and let your kids use it instead of the GPS.

In September, take older  
kids dove hunting.



DAVID STONNER

## September

**Race woolly bears.** In September, fuzzy black-and-brown woolly bear caterpillars show up in full force. Let your kids round up a few, then draw a circle in the dirt about the size of a hula hoop. Place the captive caterpillars in the center, and make bets on whose woolly bear will make it outside the circle first.

**Tag butterflies.** Monarch butterflies flutter through Missouri every September on their way to wintering grounds in Mexico. Your kids can help scientists monitor monarch populations by catching migrating butterflies and placing identification tags on their wings. Tagging kits (with easy-to-follow instructions) can be ordered from [www.monarchwatch.org](http://www.monarchwatch.org).

### Climb a tree.

**Role play.** Doesn't that downed tree look like a pirate ship? Could the animal trail leading into the woods be the path to a lost city? Maybe that hole in a tree leads to the castle of a fairy princess. Set the stage and let your child's imagination run wild. Be sure to join in the fun—after all, someone needs to be the evil pirate king.

**Go dove hunting.** For entry-level practice in the art of wing-shooting, take older kids dove hunting. The only gear required is a shotgun, shells and some camouflage clothing. For regulations, season dates and hunting tips, visit the hunting page at [www.MissouriConservation.org/7604](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/7604).

## October

**Round up a rainbow.** Take your kids on a hike in mid-October to witness Missouri's trees at their showiest. Challenge them to collect a leaf of every color in the rainbow.

**Bag some bushytails.** Squirrel hunting provides hours of fun and is a cheap gateway for your kids to the sport of hunting. Regulation information, season dates and tips on cleaning squirrels can be found on the hunting page at [www.MissouriConservation.org/7604](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/7604).

### Float leaves or sticks down a stream.

**Create some cordage.** Milkweed pods pop open this month. Let your children scatter the fluffy seeds in the wind, then use the milkweed stems to make cordage for bracelets. To learn how, visit [www.MissouriConservation.org/7625](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/7625).

**Host a weenie roast.** October is the perfect month to build a bonfire and let your kids roast hotdogs and marshmallows. Older kids can gather wood and build the fire, learning an important survival skill in the process.

## November

**Feed the birds.** Help your kids coat pine cones with peanut butter, roll them in birdseed and tie a string to their stalk. Hang up these "all natural" bird feeders, and in no



**In November, rake leaves for your kids to jump in.**

time, flocks of cardinals, chickadees and nuthatches will arrive for a feast.

### Rake leaves into a pile for your kids to jump in.

**Get starry-eyed.** Dry fall air is a boon to stargazing. Head outside with your kids on a crisp, clear night, take along a star chart from [www.skymaps.com](http://www.skymaps.com), and behold the Milky Way in all its splendor. If you have a laser pointer, use it to point out constellations to your children.

## December

**Sculpt some snow.** Snowmen are great, but if the snow packs well, don't stop there—with enough imagination, your kids can sculpt a whole menagerie of creatures. Let them decorate their creations with foods, such as birdseed or nuts, that will attract wildlife.

### Ice skate on a frozen pond.

**Catch some fish.** Take older kids to a trout park Friday through Sunday for catch-and-release fly fishing. The cold weather keeps crowds thin, providing the perfect opportunity for beginning fly anglers to hone their skills. For information on winter trout fishing, visit [www.MissouriConservation.org/18703](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/18703).

**Just get outside**—your kids will know what to do. ▲

## New Kids' Magazine

Want more ideas to entice your kids outside? Try *Xplor*, the Department's new kids' magazine. Jam-packed with eye-popping art, photos and stories about Missouri's coolest critters, niftiest natural places and fun things to do in nature, *Xplor* is sure to pull your child off the couch and out the door. This free bimonthly magazine will hit mailboxes in February. Don't miss a single issue, subscribe today at [www.XplorMo.org](http://www.XplorMo.org).

# A Pheasant Hunting FRATERNITY

Hunting thrills and warm friendships hold this club together.

by TOM Cwynar, photos by DAVID STONNER







**W**hen members of the Pheasant Hunters of America, Inc. take to the field, local pheasants take notice. The birds keep their heads low, but their ear tufts shoot up and their feathers flare as they nervously cock their eyes from side to side. It's easy to imagine some of them wishing they'd gotten their affairs in order.

During the group's annual hunt, 40 or more disciplined hunters and a platoon of bird dogs may work the same

large field. The hunt coordinator posts blockers at the end of the field to intercept birds that choose to run instead of fly and at the sides of the field to ambush sneaky pheasants trying to dodge around the advancing line.

You might think that even the most nimble game bird wouldn't stand a chance against such a concentrated effort, but exceptions occur. They come up—wings whirring and big as chickens—hover for a second then glide off toward the horizon, unruffled by a staggering number of shotgun blasts.

The hunters who fired watch in awe as if they'd witnessed a miracle. The rest are either chuckling or "giving it to" the ones who missed.

"That's a beautiful bird," one hunter remarks.

"And he's still flying," says another.

### Good-Time Hunts

The teasing is offset by plenty of sharing and helping. The same guy who minutes ago proclaimed you couldn't hit a pheasant on a tree limb, will praise your next shot and help you stuff the bird in your game bag.

"It's like having 40 best friends," Club President Steve Mannery says. "They're just a good group of guys who you know would do anything for you."

The Pheasant Hunters of America formed (incorporated) in Missouri in 1969. The Cooper and the Gilmer families from southeast Missouri started the ball rolling. The sons from those families went through school together and gained additional hunting buddies at college and in their careers. When Jesse Gilmer's job took him to Nebraska, he told his friends about the great pheasant hunting there, and the group started a tradition of an annual hunt.

By the time they incorporated as a club, the members were spread across five states: Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, California and Nebraska. The founders blended the initials of the five states and called themselves the MOILMICANE Hunting Group.

The member's patch created by the club's founders contains a misprint, spelling the name MOLIMICANE, instead. It says something about the club that through the years, the club never changed it, and the members wear the original design on blazers, hats and hunting gear.

The patch also features a star, a pheasant, a gun and a dog, and the words "The Ole Hunting Duds." That, too, is a misprint.

"It was supposed to have been "Dudes," says Mannery, who lives in the Kansas City area and is the club's third president. "When I first came to the club, I said, 'Mr. President, this is spelled wrong. Why don't we fix it on the next one?' He says, 'No, leave it alone ... you're not even in the club yet.'"



**The MOILMICANE Hunting Group's annual hunt now takes place south of Des Moines, where there are plenty of pheasants to hunt for all the members.**

“Now it really fits us—Ole Duds,” Mannery joked.

Club members actually range from 16 years old to too old to count. Although most of the officers and members of the board of directors live in Missouri, club members come from many more than the original five states.

The club’s members include doctors, lawyers, judges, dentists and engineers, but what a member does for a living is not nearly as important as his character.

Mannery credits the long-term success of the club to a policy in which potential new members not only have to be invited to the annual hunt by a current member, but they also have to be asked back a second time.

“It’s always been a club of some real decent men,” Mannery says. “If you come in there with personal ambition for the glory of the hunt, then you probably need to hunt with someone else, but anybody who is secure in themselves and is hopeful for tomorrow won’t have any problems fitting in.”

## The Annual Hunt

Although some of the members fish or hunt together throughout the year, the annual hunt is the club’s big event, usually drawing around 40 of the nearly 60 registered members for three days of pheasant hunting.

The big hunt used to take place in Nebraska, but finding enough wild birds for that many hunters became more and more difficult. The club now meets just south of Des Moines, where it books a hunt that provides lodging, lots of land to hunt and enough pheasants to keep the members’ interest up.

“It’s really the best situation for us,” Mannery says. “We’d never be able to go to a wild area and get this much action. For our group, for this time in our life, it doesn’t get any better than this. We either do it this way, or we sit back and think about years gone by.”

One of the club’s original founders, Dr. Charles W. Cooper of Holts Summit, has attended every annual hunt since the club started 38 years ago.

“It’s a fun thing, and I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” Cooper says. “There are all kinds of characters there, and they come up with all kinds of different things, but we’re very tight and close, just like brothers.”

Cooper, known as “Doc,” is probably the club’s most respected member. He’s the one first-timers have to walk with to learn how to hunt pheasants correctly, and he’s the one who tells them what a serious responsibility it is to be carrying a gun out in the field.

## Safety Always

“We have a man here with a black bag, we have a preacher, but we don’t have a mortician,” Doc says at a recent hunt, af-



Steve Mannery with his dog, Patches

## Dog Talk

Members of the Pheasant Hunters of America are keenly loyal to their dogs. One club member, holding his struggling Brittany spaniel while others swabbed it with tomato juice, kept praising the animal for its brave attempt to retrieve a live skunk.

Another member stood up at a recent meeting and requested that the club formally recognize his dog, Duke, with a certificate for being able to hold point on a cow.

“I just happen to own the best dog,” Club President Mannery says. “His name’s Stitch, from Smooth Simon West. Stitch will do anything but pluck a bird, and if you don’t like plucking, he’ll try it for you.”

Doc Cooper, hearing this report, sighed. “To tell you the truth,” he says, “if I had that dog—Steve’s Stitch—I wouldn’t feed him. He can’t see; he can’t hear. I raise Brittanies, and I know . . . I just wouldn’t feed him.”

Doc says that he has been blessed with the top dog in the club. The dog’s name is Major, and he’s 6 years old.

“He’s so good,” Doc says, “that the only thing he doesn’t know is how much salt and pepper to put on the meat.”

ter he’d lined up the newcomers for their final safety lecture before they hunted with club members for the first time. Even before they’d arrived at the field, those potential members had to watch an hour-long film on hunting safety.

Long-time members also receive constant reminders about hunter responsibility. Every group of hunters has a designated safety coordinator who delivers a safety lecture before the hunting begins.

Whenever members are standing around before a hunt or gathering for a break, they have to have their gun broken down or the breech open. At the end of each hunt, they have to show the safety inspector that their shotguns are empty and the breeches are open.

The safety coordinator also makes it clear when shooting is to stop. In a video of one of the group hunts, the



**The club is reaching out to include kids who might not otherwise have a chance to enjoy the outdoors as a group.**

safety coordinator tells the hunters, “When we get through with the hunt down there and we say, ‘That’s it!’ No more shooting. I don’t care what comes up. You’re not to shoot that gun.”

Each group also has a hunt coordinator who keeps the hunters organized and in safe positions as they work a field. “They line them up; they pair them up,” Doc says. “Let someone make a misstep, they will be told.”

Insistence on safe hunting has kept the club accident free for all of its 38 years.

“If we have one accident, it could ruin the whole thing,” says Club Vice-President Alan Cooper of Jefferson City. “That’s why we watch out for each other. If you are drinking beer, for example, you aren’t going hunting.”

Cooper says that for most of the membership hunting is just a part of the total experience, anyway. The trip gives the members a great excuse to get together.

“It’s totally social,” he says. “It’s not all about the birds. It’s about brotherliness and having a good time with friends. Some guys only go hunting once or twice in three days, and we have one member who doesn’t even bring a gun.”

## Jacket Night

A dress-up dinner caps off each annual hunt. Here’s where stories of who killed what, who pointed what and who did what are told and retold, and nicknames like “Cleanhead” and “One-Shot Pete” are indelibly stamped on members.

During a recent dinner a member received tongue-in-cheek praise for “preshooting,” knocking down pheasants before they could fly ten feet.

On another occasion, Doc noted the unusual circumstance in which 27 shots were fired at a bird that flew away with nobody acknowledging a miss, but every shooter claiming to have hit a pheasant that finally fell after 17 shots.

At the dinner, members give tribute to their fellow hunters with numerous awards that range from Sharpest, Best-Looking Hunter to Minister of Cognac, from the Arnold Schwarzenegger Terminator Award to the Mustard Gas Award, which is given to the member who often could be found standing alone.

Dogs are half the hunt, and they aren’t forgotten at jacket night. Dog stories run rampant, and members covet the Top Dog award.

A new dog named Rock won a recent Top Pup award for managing to both point a bird and catch it before it could flush. The presenter suggested to his owner, however, that he should look into having Don King promote the dog’s next fight.

## A Salute

On their last day in the field of each annual hunt, the members of the Pheasant Hunters of America gather for a solemn salute to fallen members—seven at the latest count.

After a prepared tribute, the speaker reads the name of each departed member and a shotgun is fired so that, as the speaker says, “they will hear the salute and will know that we still love them.”

The ceremony serves as a poignant reminder that for the club to go on, new members must replace the old ones.

Mannery says the club is reaching out to include inner city kids or kids who might otherwise go through life and not know about or have a chance to experience being a part of a group enjoying a wholesome outdoor activity.

Mannery said the club’s policy of requiring new members to be invited by a current member doesn’t rule out bringing in such youngsters.

“Everybody knows some kid who would benefit,” Mannery said. “I contend that if you get a kid involved in something that’s positive or you can get them around positive people, you have a real good chance of doing some good. I can tell you for sure that these guys will always lift you up, one way or another.” ▲

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*Species of Concern: Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake*, by Jim Low, NextGEN, March  
*Species of Concern: Grass Pink*, by Jim Low, NextGEN, June  
*Species of Concern: Hine's Emerald Dragonfly*, by Jim Low, NextGEN, July  
*Species of Concern: Missouri Cave Lichen*, by Jim Low, NextGEN, Feb.  
*Species of Concern: Pink Mucket*, by Jim Low, NextGEN, May  
*Species of Concern: Western Chicken Turtle*, by Jim Low, NextGEN, Sept.  
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*Spring's Hallelujah Chorus*, by Jim Low, NextGEN, March  
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*Wildlife Compact Growing*, by Jim Low, News & Events, Oct.  
*Smooth Sumac*, by Nichole LeClair Terrill, NextGEN, Nov.  
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# Hunting and Fishing Calendar

## FISHING

	OPEN	CLOSE
Black Bass (certain Ozark streams, see the <i>Wildlife Code</i> )	5/23/09	2/28/10
impoundments and other streams year-round		
Gigging Nongame Fish	9/15/09	1/31/10

## HUNTING

	OPEN	CLOSE
Coyotes	5/11/09	3/31/10
Crow	11/1/09	3/31/10
Deer		
Firearms		
Youth	1/2/10	1/3/10
Antlerless	11/25/09	12/6/09
Muzzleloader	12/19/09	12/29/09
Archery	11/25/09	1/15/10
Furbearers	11/15/09	1/31/10
Groundhog	5/11/09	12/15/09
Pheasant		
North Zone	11/1/09	1/15/10
Southeast Zone	12/1/09	12/12/09
Quail	11/1/09	1/15/10
Rabbits	10/1/09	2/15/10
Ruffed Grouse	10/15/09	1/15/10
Squirrels	5/23/09	2/15/10
Turkey		
Archery	11/25/09	1/15/10
Waterfowl	please see the <i>Waterfowl Hunting Digest</i> or see <a href="http://www.missouriconservation.org/7573">www.missouriconservation.org/7573</a>	
Wilson's (Common) Snipe	9/1/09	12/16/09

## TRAPPING

	OPEN	CLOSE
Beaver & Nutria	11/15/09	3/31/10
Furbearers	11/15/09	1/31/10
Otter & Muskrats	11/15/09	see <i>Wildlife Code</i>

For complete information about seasons, limits, methods and restrictions, consult the *Wildlife Code* and the current summaries of *Missouri Hunting and Trapping Regulations* and *Missouri Fishing Regulations*, the *Fall Deer and Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information*, the *Waterfowl Hunting Digest* and the *Migratory Bird Hunting Digest*. For more information visit [www.MissouriConservation.org/8707](http://www.MissouriConservation.org/8707) or permit vendors.

The Department of Conservation's computerized point-of-sale system allows you to purchase or replace your permits through local vendors or by phone. The toll-free number is 800-392-4115. Allow 10 days for delivery of telephone purchases. To purchase permits online go to [www.wildlifelicenses.com/mo/](http://www.wildlifelicenses.com/mo/).



# OPERATION GAME THIEF

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## Contributors



TOM Cwynar is a writer/editor for the *Conservationist* who often writes about fishing Missouri waters. Tom said he has a variety of interests, but that he generally likes the outdoors more than the indoors and activity more than passivity. He is currently trying to teach his new little white boat to catch fish.

Following hounds at night is one of REX MAR-TENSEN'S many outdoor pursuits. His best times in the woods are those spent with his kids. He is a long-time Department employee who currently supervises the wildlife damage management program. Rex and his family reside in Moniteau County.



When not writing and editing for the Department, MATT SEEK tries to spend every spare moment outside with his kids. His daughter, Maya, enjoys duck boat rides, catching bluegill and hunting butterflies. Gabe, his 3-year-old, is a champion squirrel stalker, rock thrower and dirt digger. Matt couldn't be prouder of them.

# WHAT IS IT?

## Red Bat

On the back cover and right is an Eastern red bat by Noppadol Paothong. Red bats are tree bats and roost amongst leaves. They are the most commonly seen species in the state. Occurring statewide, they emerge at dusk to forage along woods edges, over streams, along roads and around street lights. When temperatures drop below freezing, red bats nestle into leaf litter on the ground and hibernate until temperatures rise. Live bats should only be handled by trained individuals who have received proper vaccinations.



## AGENT NOTES

*Increase your odds of seeing wildlife this winter.*

WINTER IS A great time for viewing wildlife. After a new snow, the white background makes spotting wildlife much easier. Harsh conditions keep wildlife on the move, also increasing your chances of seeing many different species.

Extended periods of snow and ice can be detrimental to wildlife. Generally, wildlife need four things to multiply and survive—food, cover, water and space. In many areas of Missouri water and space are available, so concentrate on



food and cover. If you decide to feed wildlife be sure to do so near escape cover. It doesn't take predators long to learn the location of prey. Create cover that can stand up to wintry conditions.

Food can be supplied in several ways. Some food sources are weed seeds, acorns, food plots and grain left in the field by farmers.

Wildlife rely on known food sources through winter, so continue to feed once you have started. Also remember feeding wildlife is considered baiting while hunting many species of wildlife, and it is illegal to hunt on property that has feeders or grain placed on it. Be sure to have all grain cleaned up at least 10 days prior to hunting the property. Consult the *Wildlife Code* for the complete regulations about baiting.

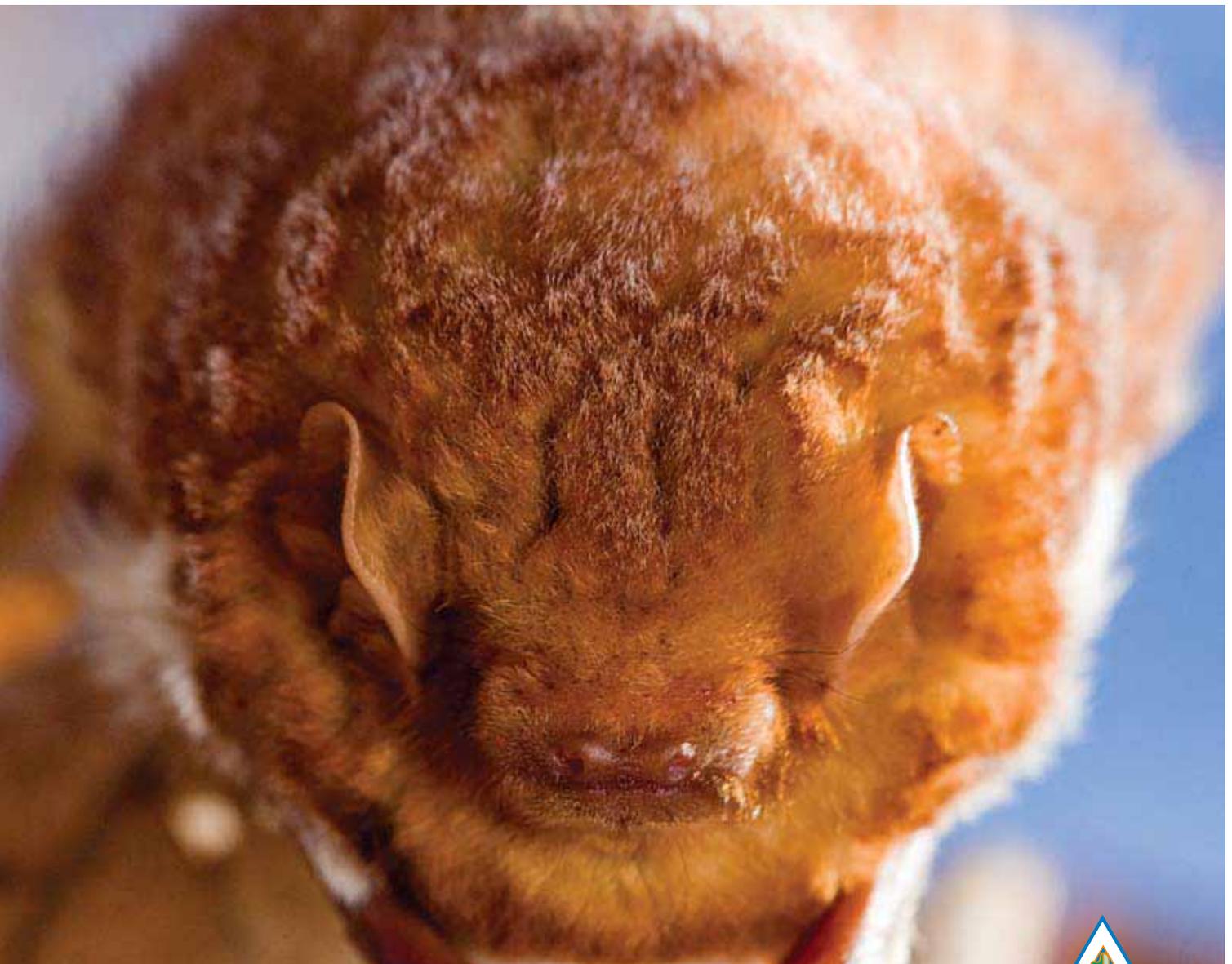
Follow these tips for providing food and cover during the severe winter months and you will be rewarded with many wildlife viewing opportunities.



Rob Farr is the conservation agent for Benton County, which is in the Kansas City Region. If you would like to contact the agent for your county, phone your regional Conservation office listed on Page 3.

# WHAT IS IT?

Our photographers have been busy exploring the intricacies of the Missouri outdoors. See if you can guess this month's natural wonder. The answer is revealed on the inside of this back cover.



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